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August 2006



Two-day Stand Down Event draws nearly 600 Homeless Veterans

By NELSON SIMAO

Ralph Peters, Executive Director of the Veterans Benefits Clearinghouse in Roxbury, has seen many things change since he helped co-found the Boston Veterans Benefits Clearinghouse event, Operation Stand Down, 15 years ago. But one thing has remained constant: the need among homeless veterans for housing and services.

When, in the early 1990's, opponents of Operation Stand Down forced venue changes for the event, Mr. Peters was not surprised. Considering the amount of (continued on pg. 4)



Parole Officers stand ready to provide reentry information to homeless veterans at Operation Stand Down in Roxbury this month. The event, sponsored by the Boston Veterans Benefits Clearinghouse, is an opportunity for homeless veterans to learn about hundreds of social services, including reentry planning for ex-offenders with military service. (from left) Region 2 Reentry Officer Pearl Holder, Region 8 Assistant Parole Supervisor Ray Chavaree, Region 2 Supervisor Debra Wornum and Assistant Parole Supervisor, Joe Waystack.

Brockton Halfway House Nurtured by Community Support

From the outside, the three-level house looks like a typical Market Street residence: large, with white siding and a patchy strip of grass in front. But since February, the Brockton house has been leased by the nearby Mt. Moriah Baptist Church and converted to a halfway house for men recently released on parole and probation.

Inside, the house is utilitar-

ian, but clean, and even homey. The freshly scrubbed sink, floors, and cabinets sparkle in the well-lit kitchen and the smell of cleaning products hang in the air. The living room walls seem freshly painted, and the arm chair and sofas around the TV look comfortable and inviting.

Less than one month ago, resident Robert Burgo was

serving a two-year sentence for unlawful possession of a controlled substance at the Plymouth County House of Correction. Now on parole, he was recently accepted to Massasoit Community College where he will take courses to sharpen his computer skills and learn about marketing the manuscript he wrote in prison, "The Life

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Chairman's Column

By Parole Board Chairman Maureen Walsh

The new parole hearings room in Natick creates a professional environment and is comfortable and clean for the victims, witnesses, and the public to attend and participate.



As the summer season soon comes to an end, it seemed that this would be a good time to discuss some of the plans and initiatives for the agency that will be occurring in the fall.

Over the summer months, several things have been going on in the central office. First, the final touches are coming together nicely for the hearings room in Natick. The elevator, which was the last challenge to overcome, has been installed, and will be inspected in the next few weeks. This will allow us to become centralized once again and conduct Lifer hearings in our Natick office. Currently, the victim access hearings have been held in Natick, and the board has been pleased with the results. The hearings

room creates a professional environment and is comfortable and clean for victims, witnesses, and the public to attend and participate.

We also anticipate several trainings in the fall, including the roll-out of the graduated sanctions statewide, and a training for agency staff from Family Justice, a New York based organization that trains on issues involving reentry and the family. We also anticipate that the decision-making guidelines will be finalized and implemented. It is our hope that the risk assessment tool will soon follow, making ours a more comprehensive approach to parole decision making.

Finally, we anticipate our Annual Agency Meeting some time between late September and early October. This will give us an opportunity to meet as a group and share thoughts and ideas for the betterment of the agency in the year to come.

I hope that everyone enjoyed their summer and I am looking forward to more progress in the fall!



Region 5 [Springfield] Parole Officer Richard Valenti demonstrates on Policy and Training Coordinator Paul Gallagher during a self defense training this summer.

New parole officer Daniel Polak overpowers Anthony Scopa at a self defense training this summer, while Region 4 [Worcester] Parole Officer Eric Mawhinney (right) and Administrative Assistant Dave O'Connor observe.



Profile: Mike Brown

Chief of Field Services

Mike Brown was promoted to Chief of Field Services in 2003, after serving for three years as Deputy Chief Parole Supervisor, and for ten years as a Field Parole Officer in the cities of Lynn, Lawrence, and Framingham.

Chief Brown was instrumental in the development of the Intensive Parole for Sex Offenders [I.P.S.O] program, which has reduced recidivism among participating sex offenders to almost zero percent, and has received attention and praise from the national and international law enforcement communities.

"The knowledge I have gained while working for the Parole Board is invaluable. The friends and colleagues that I have had the privilege of working with have made my career with the Parole Board that much more rewarding," said Chief Brown when asked to comment on his role within the agency.

Chief Brown reports directly to the Executive Director of the Parole Board, and is responsible for the oversight of approximately 114 staff working out of the agency's central administrative office in Natick, eight regional parole offices, eight Regional Reentry Centers, and the Warrant and Apprehension Unit in Braintree. "My responsibilities include the oversight and management of the Field Services Division," said Chief Brown, "to ensure that it fulfills both the agency's mission and the agency's statutory and regulatory mandates of providing supervision and assistance to parolees, enforcing parole conditions, investigating violations of parole conditions, and imposing sanctions, including return to custody, that are consistent with public safety concerns."

Chief Brown is one of 16 brothers and sisters. Born in Jamaica Plain, he grew up in West Roxbury and attended Boston Public Schools. He served in the U.S. Navy for four years, specializing in radio communications. From 1969 to 1970, he was assigned to the River Assault Boats in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam.

Before coming to parole, Chief Brown served as a Westwood police officer for 11 years, and spent eight years in the private sector. He joined the Massachusetts Parole Board in 1990 as a Field Parole Officer assigned to the Region 6 Parole Office in Lowell (the office has since relocated to Lawrence).

Chief Brown covered the city of Lawrence before transferring to the former Region 3 Parole Office in Somerville, where he covered the city of Lynn for about three years before transferring to the Region 9 Parole Office in Framingham.

In 1996, Chief Brown and fellow Parole Officer Gary Levitt spearheaded a pilot program for managing sex offenders, known as the Intensive Parole for Sex Offenders [I.P.S.O] program. The program combines a multitude of law enforcement tools, including counseling, electronic monitoring, polygraph testing, and curfew enforcement. Chief Brown considers I.P.S.O one of the agency's greatest accomplishments.



Q. What qualities do you see as most important for a Field Parole Officer to have?

A. Appreciation of the responsibilities that come with the position, maintaining public safety as a priority, dedication to the position, loyalty, honesty, pride, integrity, compassion, and being a good listener.

Q. What advice would you give to someone who is interested in becoming a Field Parole Officer? What can they do to best prepare themselves for this job?

A. A prior knowledge of how our state government is structured and how it works, the ability to remain focused on your goals and keep your options open. Learn as much as you can about the field you are in. Network, and build bridges with your counterparts in other agencies.

Report from the Homelessness Front Line: Operation Stand Down

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Parole Board Director of Reentry Kira Dunn (center) stands with Assistant Parole Supervisors Ray Chavaree (left) and Joe Waystack at the Operation Stand Down in Roxbury this month.

...misinformation about the event and the number of homeless veterans in need. "They thought we were going to have homeless people flown into town! They didn't think there were homeless vets already in town," said Mr. Peters.

Despite opposition, Mr. Peters and co-founder Ron Armstead continued their mission educating people about the hurdles faced by homeless veterans. This year, Boston's Clifford Park was once again transformed into a kind of "one-stop center" for homeless veterans to access food, clothing, walk-in emergency medical services, legal assistance, driver's licenses, counseling, IRS information, employment, and help obtaining housing.

Although the goal of Stand Down is to identify and serve the needs of homeless veterans, Mr. Peters pulls no punches about its expectations. In keeping with its "a

hand up not a hand down" approach, organizers and volunteers know success depends on the individual taking initiative to seek help and follow through.

Military-style tents were set up throughout Clifford Park to help veterans navigate the multiple services offered at the event. However, the tents also provided more. "Having the homeless veterans set up tents brings back memories of better days, when they were sergeants, corporals, etc., and they had important responsibilities and they were strong and respected," Mr. Peters said.

The Massachusetts Parole Board tent was staffed by reentry staff from the Quincy, Mattapan, New Bedford, and Natick Offices. Veterans learned about the agency's efforts to help veterans who are also ex-offenders. Regional Reentry Centers throughout the state provide assistance with housing, health-care, counseling, and job placement.

Mr. Peters is also grateful for the support of the Veterans Administration, the National Guard, the U.S. Army, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, without which he said the event could not have taken place. Although this year's event drew the largest crowd in years, Mr. Peters has not become complacent. His next project is to work with the Department of Housing and Urban Development on affordable housing. *(continued on the following page)*



Representatives from Jewish War Veterans of the United States hand out packages of socks at Operation Stand Down.

Plainville Company Donates Bunk Beds to Halfway House

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Mr. Burgo, armed with his GED and an impressive stack of certificates from programs he completed in prison has a new life philosophy: if you do the right thing, good things will happen to you.

The other residents of the house—up to 12 at a time—are also on parole or probation for sentences served at the Plymouth County House of Correction and the Bristol County House of Correction. They sleep two or three per room on bunk beds, provided by Shawnlee Construction., a

Plainville company that donated parts, labor, and construction for the beds. Seeking privacy, one resident elected to move his things into a tiny room that once was the pantry. An especially motivated resident was chosen to be site supervisor and given his own room as a perk.

The housing program is part of Mt. Moriah's Reentry Compassion Ministry, created by Pastor Eugene Neville in 2004. The program is sponsored by the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office and funded through a federal "Weed and Seed" grant from the Department of Justice.

"We need to offer housing to inmates being released," said Raymond Yancey, a case manager for the reentry program. Inmates are often required to enter a tran-

sitional program as a condition of their parole, rather than be released to the street, said Mr. Yancey. Brockton has a shortage of these programs, and Mr. Moriah is trying to fill the gap, he said.

Mt. Moriah's reentry program is operated by Mr. Yancey, fellow case manager Rose O'Brien, and two mentor-counselors.

The program offers counseling and assistance to all former inmates, but the housing program is more selective, and case managers interview prospective residents at the institutions prior to their release. Inmates must fill out an application to be placed in a bed, and must come recommended by jail staff.

Residents must pay \$130 a week in rent, encouraging them to find full-time employment right away. Several residents have had luck finding jobs at a Brockton candy company that is open to hiring workers with criminal records looking to turn over a new leaf.

Unlike some programs, there is no limit on how long residents can stay at Mt. Moriah, and progress is assessed on a month-month basis by case managers and the residents themselves. Ideally, residents and case managers come to an agreement about when the resident is ready to leave. Mt. Moriah has a close relationship with the Region 7 parole office in Brockton, and case managers are in frequent communication with the Region 7 parole officers who supervise Mt. Moriah residents. The parole officers check in to make sure that residents are attending classes and counseling sessions for anger management, substance abuse, and domestic violence. Some of the services are offered directly at Mt. Moriah, and referrals are made to outside agencies such as the MainSpring homeless shelter. Plans are underway to lease the third floor of the building, now occupied by a tenant, and to expand the program's 12-bed capacity.



Bunk beds at Mt. Moriah halfway house in Brockton donated by Shawnlee Construction of Plainville.



Robert Burgo (left), one of five residents at a Brockton halfway house run by Mt. Moriah Baptist Church sits with his case managers, Rose O'Brien and Ray Yancey.

Operation Stand Down

Continued from the previous page

However today, Mr. Peters can bask in the rays of the summer sun, which to an outsider no doubt increased the turnout, but as Mr. Peters tells it, it makes little difference. "I remember speaking years ago to someone who asked when the rain date was for the Stand Down. I turned to him and said, there are no rain dates when you're homeless."

Substance Abuse Coordinator will create Support Group for Ex-Offenders *Seeks input, participation from parole staff*

Substance Abuse Coordinator Steve Bisson of the Region 9 Parole Office in Framingham is forming a support group to offer guidance to ex-offenders seeking housing, health care, employment, and other services.

The support group will help to re-enforce parallel efforts at the regional parole offices, which already offer ex-offenders and parolees referrals to counseling, medical care, and job placement. The group will meet once a week for a 12-week period, and is planned to take place at Advocates, Inc. in Framingham, Mr. Bisson's home agency.

Mr. Bisson is one of eight Substance Abuse Coordinators contracted by the Massachusetts Parole Board to work out of the agency's eight regional offices, located in Mattapan, Quincy, Worcester, Springfield, Brockton, Lawrence, New Bedford, and Framingham. The substance abuse coordinators, or SAC's, offer parolees and ex-offenders counseling and referrals for medication, medical care, and substance abuse/mental health services.

Mr. Bisson plans to run the new support group with Kelly Moran, a fellow counselor from Advocates. Weekly meetings will focus on a single topic or several topics relevant to reentry.

In deciding how to structure the group, Ms. Moran and Mr. Bisson surveyed a group of ex-offenders and plan to survey an additional group, along with parole officers, probation officers, police officers, and judges.

Those interested in offering input or participating in the group may contact Mr. Bisson at the Region 9 Parole Office, 508-875-0621.

New Veterans Housing In Gardner

In September, 2006, Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc. will open a transitional housing program for homeless veterans, which will provide Veterans Administration [V.A] subsidized sober housing for up to 24 months per person.

Residents will be required to pay \$180 per month, a cost that includes heat, air conditioning, hot water, and electricity. The housing includes a shared kitchen and common area, secure food storage for residents, laundry facilities, three full bedrooms, and on-site parking.

The building will be fully accessible with elevator service to all floors, and wheelchair units will be available. Support for recovery from substance abuse will be emphasized, and veterans will be expected to participate in case management and weekly support groups.

Eligibility Requirements:

- U.S. Veteran with a valid DD214 and eligible for VA services
- Male or female, age 18+
- Homeless, according to Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] and VA standards
- Gross monthly income equal to or less than \$1,255
- If his or her disability includes substance abuse, the applicant must have three months of sobriety
- Applicant must be interested in living within a sober supportive housing program
- Limited on-site services must be adequate to meet the applicant's needs.

To apply, please call (978) 632-9601, or visit the Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center at 268 Central Street in Gardner, Mon-Fri., 9 AM to 4:30 PM to obtain an application.

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